

Regional Indicators as Civic Governance Using Measurement to Identify and Act Upon Community Priorities

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The *New Civic Index*, introduced in this journal by Michael McGrath and Gloria Rubio-Cortés in 2012, points to seven essential components of civic infrastructure that comprise the foundation for community success. The new index is actually the third version of the original Civic Index, first proposed at the National Conference on Governance in Boston in 1987. In creating the index, the National Civic League intended to provide community leaders with a tool for understanding how they might strengthen their community's ability to engage in collective efforts to create a better future. The index, in its various iterations, has guided hundreds of communities in understanding the strong and weak points of their civic infrastructure and in taking collaborative steps to improve it.

As McGrath and Rubio-Cortés noted in their introduction of the *New Civic Index*, the urgency of the current economic crisis places greater importance on civic infrastructure as local governments find that they cannot tackle complex community issues without the full participation of all sectors of the community. Thus, the new index reflects the need to put citizens in a more active role in solving problems in their community. The seven essential components of the *New Civic Index* are:

1. Participation and civic engagement
2. Diversity and inclusiveness
3. Networking, information, and communication
4. Decision making and consensus building
5. Partnerships and collaboration
6. Leadership
7. Community vision and pride

Successful civic governance requires tools that assist leaders and citizens in building the seven capacities of successful communities illuminated by the index. Creating the tools of civic governance is not a simple

task. This article demonstrates how a regional community indicators effort in the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area has constructed an important tool for building the seven capacities of civic governance measured by the *New Civic Index*. The Greater Portland Pulse (GPP) project engaged a broad spectrum of the community in a conversation about priorities for the future and built an information system that improves communication about priorities, enables informed inclusive dialogue, encourages partnership to address these priorities, and paints a vision for the community's future.

Civic Governance, Collective Impact, and Regional Indicators

Governance—the traditions, systems, and institutions by which societies make collective choices—is much broader than the formal system of government articulated in the U.S. Constitution and in local government charters. In many cases, formal government is simply not sufficient to perform the important tasks of civic governance. Our societies and the issues we face have become so complex that we must employ that broader notion of governance and the informal institutions and tools essential to collective decision making and action.

This is especially true for metropolitan regions. Most regions have no formal system of governance, and in many cases local governments, in the absence of a regional system, have difficulty putting aside their parochial interests to collaborate to solve regional problems. (An exception is coordinated transportation planning and funding, required by the U.S. Congress as part of metropolitan planning organization processes.) Thus, many regions are developing informal systems to identify the key issues facing regions and to encourage cooperation among public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

John Kania and Mark Kramer have introduced the term “collective impact” to describe collaborative efforts to solve seemingly intractable policy issues by recognizing that no single organization—no matter how well funded—can solve these problems on their own. Rather, collective impact requires collaboration across public, private, and nonprofit sectors and alignment of their efforts.

One of the key elements of collective impact is a common agenda and a shared measurement system that identifies success. This element ties the practice of collective impact to a movement with a longer history and uneven track record in the United States—the community indicators movement. The practice of tracking community indicators began in the early twentieth century. Today the Community Indicators Consortium counts at least 245 communities across North America that have developed community indicators.

The simple tool of a shared measurement system serves an important role—that of ensuring that actors in the system are working with the same set of information. But the process of developing a shared measurement system can achieve much more. It can serve as a priority-setting process and can create demand for collective action by encouraging dialogue about what outcomes are important enough to be measured and tracked over time. It also serves as a tool for education and engagement as participants discover how the outcomes—and, therefore, issues important to different groups—are connected to each other. Thus, a shared measurement system and the conversations that it encourages can offer a substantial element of civic infrastructure that may be missing, particularly for metropolitan areas.

Why Regional Indicators?

Some community indicators projects focus on a single jurisdiction, such as a city, county, or state. This practice vastly simplifies the process of gathering indicator data, but it may limit the usefulness of the information for developing and implementing effective collective measures to improve the quality of life for residents. While public policy is often *administered* at these levels, the impact of the state, county, and municipal policy environment is often felt not only within its own borders but also *be-*

yond its borders. Furthermore, the impacts may be distributed unequally. For example, land use policy that sets minimum lot sizes may affect the cost of housing in one community and therefore influence location choices available to people throughout a commute area. In their 1996 article “Neighborhood Indicators,” David S. Sawicki and Patrice Flynn remind us that if we intend to develop indicators that inform policy, we must consider the geographic impact of the policy and choose a geographic area not for its convenience in gathering data but for its relevance to the policy question.

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Academics and practitioners in planning and economic development have generally accepted the notion that the metropolitan region is an increasingly relevant unit of analysis and strategy related to economic development, environmental quality, and equity. Practitioners and writers such as Bruce Katz, Myron Orfield, and Neal Peirce have argued for the realignment of community and economic development efforts around regions. Despite this acceptance of regions as the right scale to act on a number of issues, few regions have formal forms of general governance. Allan Wallis argues that strong formal regional governance is politically infeasible and that alternative forms of governance are required to fill the gap. Furthermore, writers such as Chris Benner and Manuel Pastor call for filling this gap with a governance system that is focused on measuring progress and adjusting policies and programs in response.

Focusing on indicators at the regional level also provides standing for regional nongovernmental organizations. Many nonprofits operate at the regional level. Private sector organizations, including economic development entities, utilities, and community banks, have influence over entire regions. And universities and other educational institutions often have constituencies and impacts throughout a

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region. Their participation in the priority-setting and discussion process of regional indicators is essential to mobilizing the resources needed to move the needle on many of the key indicators.

Regional versus Neighborhood Scale

While collecting and discussing regional data can encourage regional collaboration, regional indicators often mask issues of spatial and socioeconomic equity. Although we can characterize places like neighborhoods or census tracts by the socioeconomic circumstances of the people who live there, those neighborhood definitions are often artificial constructs that have no real social meaning. People are mobile; and many regional policies can have an unintended effect of simply moving people.

We believe that regional indicators *tied to more spatially disaggregated data* help us to resolve the people versus place conundrum. While we monitor progress at the regional level, we must also keep track of spatial equity at the neighborhood level. Furthermore, tracking the progress of traditionally underresourced *groups of people* within cities can illustrate the importance of place. In their 2010 book, *Uncommon Common Ground* , Angela Blackwell, Stewart Kwoh, and Manuel Pastor present evidence that where people are born and grow up can largely determine their fate because it determines their access to good schools, healthy environments, and connections to people who can help them succeed. Monitoring access to those resources and their impacts for neighborhoods and their residents is one important function of a regional indicators project. Thus, creating regional systems that measure the performance of the region as well as neighborhoods and groups can serve multiple objectives of indicators projects.

History and Experience of Past Indicators Projects

Cities and regions across the country have created community indicators projects in an attempt to de-

scribe the state of sustainability, quality of life, economic prosperity, or general well-being in their communities. The Community Indicator Consortium now lists more than 245 community indicators projects on its website, communityindicators.net. Recounting the history of the community indicators movement, Milan Dluhy and Nicholas Swartz remind us that this movement grew from the desire to go beyond simple economic metrics, such as income and unemployment, to capture a more comprehensive measurement of well-being.

While measuring and displaying indicators is important, communities often engage in indicators projects to trigger the collaborative action resulting from connections created by common tracking of community indicators. For example, the Silicon Valley Index is a means of grounding the conversation about actions to improve the Silicon Valley community. The indicators were a way to inform the conversation with data, but the conversation started before the data were collected. Similarly, the Jacksonville Community Council has used its community indicators project to develop an annual agenda for change. Members of the council take ownership of the agenda and align their efforts, track progress, and reconvene to evaluate the impacts of their work.

Maintaining momentum over a number of years is one of the most difficult challenges facing indicators project organizers. Although some indicators projects, such as the Boston Indicators Project and the Jacksonville Community Council, Inc., have been very successful over the long term, others have suffered from a loss of funding as community interest wanes and momentum is lost. Successful projects have a consistent, stable source of funding born from a commitment to continuous outreach and engagement. Bringing in new voices and perspectives keeps the conversations fresh and helps participants gain new knowledge, connection, and alignment to shared regional outcomes. The effort has to prove its value as a basic piece of civic infrastructure and a tool for achieving collective impact.

Neutrality or Advocacy?

A review of the mission statements of community indicators projects reveals that most organizations supporting these projects do not state a specific political objective or advocacy motive. Their aim is to

be inclusive—to encourage dialogue across the political spectrum and to engage the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in a conversation that begins with a common set of data. But Clifford W. Cobb of *Redefining Progress* takes an alternative perspective and argues that an indicators project must start with a specific purpose in mind—a *political* purpose.

By bringing ideological differences to the surface, Cobb argues, indicators projects can contribute more to the policy debate than by compiling many indicators that do not suggest a specific policy agenda. The risk in moving in the direction of a clear advocacy role is that players who cannot engage in advocacy or disagree with the specific agenda will be excluded by necessity or choice. We believe that this exclusion renders the project impotent because it fails to form a new coalition of leaders by demonstrating the connections among supposedly disconnected outcomes. Instead, it reinforces the political alignments that already exist.

As described next, GPP was conceived not as an advocacy tool but as a way to gain a common understanding of the state of our region and the steps that should be taken to move it in the desired direction. The process of identifying the indicators prompted a number of conversations about values and priorities. Cobb's point is well taken, but in thinking through the GPP process, we felt that broad participation and inclusiveness outweighed the need to develop indicators with a specific policy agenda.

Greater Portland Pulse as a Tool of Civic Governance

GPP began in January 2010 after a group of community leaders from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors responded to an invitation from the Institute of Portland Metropolitan Studies (IMS) at Portland State University (PSU) and from the Metro regional government organization to discuss the potential for creating a powerful tool for improving regional civic governance. At that meeting, city, county, private, nonprofit, and university leaders acknowledged that existing tools were insufficient for encouraging collaboration across the region. They agreed that identifying the outcomes that matter most, gathering the data to measure them, tracking that data over time, and creating a structure for discussing the results would offer the community a new tool then missing

from the region's civic governance. Some were frustrated with previous efforts to develop indicators for the Portland region. Such efforts usually responded to state or federal mandates, were data heavy and analysis light, and did not link well to current policy discussions.

Over the following eighteen months, a project team staffed by Metro and IMS supported the effort with guidance from an advisory committee comprised of twenty-three leaders from the region's public, private, and nonprofit organizations. That phase of the project ended with the launch of the project's Web site (portlandpulse.org) and the release of the first state of the region report in the summer of 2011. The project continues today as a partnership among Metro, PSU, and a coalition of funders and supporters. Project staff organizes meetings of the partners to review the data and discuss their implications for the future of our region and the effectiveness of our policies. The project is currently transitioning to a permanent governance body that will encourage dialogue and collaboration on important community goals by meeting each quarter to discuss the trends and what is driving them.

Next we describe how the project and its outcomes provide tools that embody the seven elements of the New Civic Index.

Participation and Civic Engagement

From the project's conception, there was a strong desire for a broad engagement effort that would lend the resulting indicators the credibility of reflecting a shared sense of the community's priorities. The project structure included:

1. An executive committee, made up of project managers from the two key partners, that guided and supported the process.
2. An advisory committee, co-chaired by the presidents of PSU and the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber, that consisted of the region's public, private, and nonprofit leaders, including several mayors and city councillors, Metro councillors, nonprofit leaders, and private industry leaders. The president of Portland State University and the president of the Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber served as co-chairs.

Table 1. The Nine Results Teams

Access and Mobility
Arts, Culture, and Creativity
Civic Engagement
Economic Opportunity
Education
Healthy Natural Environment
Healthy People
Quality Housing and Communities
Safe People

3. Nine results teams containing data and policy experts suggested by the advisory committee in each of the nine key issue areas identified by the project team (see Table 1).
4. An equity panel that examined the indicators to ensure that they adequately demonstrated spatial and social equity issues.

The membership of these committees and groups comprised over 200 individuals and 100 community organizations.

The results teams conducted the majority of the work required to identify indicators, with the support of student research assistance from PSU. The first task of the results teams was to identify key outcomes within their issue area important enough to be measured and tracked consistently over time. Given the political nature of this task, the advisory committee provided feedback early in this process.

Their second task was a technical one: to determine how to measure the outcomes. They had to identify the most appropriate data; determine the suitable geographic scale and time; and decide how to visually represent the data in graphs, charts, and maps.

The teams' final task was to put the indicators in context by writing a page of information on why the data are important and how they relate to desired outcomes, what trends appear, and whether any caution should be used in interpreting the data.

This was not a linear process. We instructed the teams to first identify the key outcomes with the intention of not allowing data availability to influence outcomes. The tendency to examine only out-

Table 2. The Greater Portland Pulse Indicator Criteria

1. Each indicator should
❖ Gauge progress toward a desired regional result or outcome
❖ Be understandable and transparent to most people
❖ Drive multiple results
❖ Generate synergy across indicator categories
2. Data for each indicator should be
❖ Affordable to gather
❖ Produced by a trusted source
❖ Available consistently over time to produce a trend
❖ Available region-wide but can be disaggregated to local areas and racial and ethnic groups for comparisons and mapping
3. The number of indicators for each category should be few for the sake of clarity and simplicity but allow secondary indicators to honor the breadth and complexity of issues.
4. Developmental indicators—Although priority is given to using existing data, it is possible that consensus will emerge around the development of new indicators.

comes that are easily measured has plagued indicators projects in the past, and we were very focused about starting with *desired* outcomes. Nevertheless, because the teams included data experts, the outcome priority discussion included debates about whether outcomes could actually be measured. The teams sometimes identified outcomes for which we could find no feasible measurement method or data. These outcomes were retained within the project as “developmental indicators” that we hope to measure in the future.

We asked the teams to consider a number of factors when constructing the indicators for their outcomes (see Table 2). They found these guidelines difficult to meet, especially the restriction on the number of indicators that could be chosen (five to seven). This restriction was essential to keep the number of indicators to a reasonable number. It encouraged the teams to think critically about how an indicator might drive multiple outcomes and whether an indicator chosen by another team could better measure an outcome. Discussions among the results teams turned out to be an important and rewarding part of the process. They helped the team members understand how their key outcomes were related, and this information was shared with the advisory committee.

Diversity and Inclusiveness

In putting together each of the teams just described, we aimed for inclusivity with respect to geography, sector, political outlook, and racial and ethnic background. This was a difficult task, and we sometimes failed to capture the ideal level of diversity and inclusiveness in each work team. We did fairly well on geographic diversity, although we had difficulty finding willing representatives from one county that was in the process of a difficult and uncertain political transition. With respect to sector, our biggest failing was a less-than-adequate level of private sector participation. Although several teams included private sector members, their attendance was sporadic, and the major regional business organizations were not represented among the project's leadership. This could be attributed to an evolution in the leadership and structure of the region's business and economic development organizations; however, it also reflects a hesitance of some private sector organizations to appear supportive of an effort with an uncertain outcome.

Providing an ethnic and racial balance was also a challenge; with so many teams to populate, not all teams included as much racial and ethnic diversity as we would have liked.

Supporting a diverse set of political views was also a challenge. We thought that measurement, transparency, and accountability would appeal to participants from across the political spectrum. Nevertheless, as foretold by Cobb, discussions about outcomes and measures sometimes became politically laden as team members made assumptions about how they might drive policy. For example, early in the process, the question of how equity would be addressed in the project generated a considerable amount of discussion and conflict. Some participants felt that exploring spatial and social equity should be the core objective of the project; others were not interested in participating in a project that was focused exclusively on equity. After considerable discussion with leaders on both sides of the issue, we decided to use an equity team, comprised of members of the advisory committee, some of the results teams, and others who represented groups interested in understanding and advocating for equity. We asked the equity team to review the work of each results team and provide feedback regard-

ing how each team could more effectively convey the spatial and social equity components of the key outcomes it chose.

Networking, Information, and Communication

The project's goals explicitly included the creation of broad community dialogue about the data and an understanding of how each of the key outcomes is connected. We created this dialogue during the project's first phase and continue to support a structure for an ongoing discussion.

During the course of the project, we wanted to encourage community members to collaborate by helping them to understand how their issues, their jurisdictions, and their interest groups are connected to and affected by one another. During the process of choosing outcomes and indicators, we provided a number of opportunities for communication across results teams to enable them to understand the connections among different kinds of outcomes. This process carried over to the advisory committee meetings, where each results team presented its work and received feedback from the committee. Many of these meetings produced findings by the advisory committee that pointed out connections among results and a recommendation to explicitly demonstrate those connections in some way in the final product.

The equity team met with the leader of each of results team, and they talked about the tensions and difficulties in creating a truly representative set of indicators. Many results team leaders left those conversations with an improved understanding of how standard government statistics mask the experiences of many people and ideas for improving their transparency; the equity team also began to discuss the importance of influencing how official statistics are gathered and displayed.

Since information is the starting point for the community dialogue, we wanted to make sure that each of the indicators was put in context and that people using the data would have access to information about why the data are important, how they might be interpreted, and what issues might limit the conclusions that can be made with the data. The results teams therefore developed a separate Web page for each indicator that includes this contextual and

interpretive information. Our hope was that rather than simply using the data without understanding how they were collected or what they mean, people using the data would read the full page to ensure that they improve their understanding of the issue.

Decision Making and Consensus Building

The results teams faced a difficult task of building consensus around a small number of outcomes and indicators that represented the most important issues facing the region. For almost all teams, the most difficult decisions were about what should be cut from the lists of indicators, which were almost always too long. For example, the economic opportunity team had a long discussion about whether income inequality was an issue that was sufficiently important to warrant an indicator, knowing that it would mean that some other indicator on the first draft list would have to be eliminated. After a long discussion of how average wages masked important dynamics in the labor market, the group decided to include a measure of the distribution of wage rates; however, this decision was not unanimous. Although the majority of the team agreed with this decision, we simply could not come to consensus. In other cases, as members made their case for inclusion of specific indicators, the groups were able to achieve unanimity in their decisions.

The indicators provide a shared set of measures to inform decisions about funding, policies, and programs. On one occasion, GPP staff developed a presentation of indicators about poverty and its causes within one county in the region. This presentation was given to county commissioners and attended by other service providers, including schools and nonprofit organizations. As they listened to the presentation, looked at the maps and charts, and discussed their meaning, they realized as a group that many services were accessible to their intended beneficiaries. This was true not only for services provided by the county but also for those offered by nonprofit organizations. The presentation and shared data provided a starting point for discussing better locations for important services.

Partnership and Collaboration

Collaboration is the key to collective impact and the primary goal of GPP. Although the project is still too young to determine the extent to which new col-

laborations will form, it has already yielded several important partnerships:

- Metro and PSU continue to collaborate on project management. GPP is central to Metro's role as a regional government as they use GPP data to support their strategic plan.
- PSU and Metro have worked with nonprofit partners, such as the Oregon Community Foundation, the United Way, and the Red Cross, to demonstrate how to use the data to analyze community needs and to make the case for important projects.
- PSU and Metro have partnered with Clackamas County, Clark County, and the City of Portland to train their staffs on how to use GPP data.
- PSU and Metro are working with the region's regional economic development agency to coordinate data collection efforts and to inform the public about results of economic development initiatives.

Leadership

GPP offered a number of people new leadership opportunities. Committee co-chairs led their groups through a difficult priority-setting process with important potential impacts on policy and investment decisions. As these co-chairs worked through these issues, they developed leadership skills that will serve them into the future. Furthermore, many team members have new tools for leadership—the data required to advocate for change in their neighborhood or community. GPP gives potential leaders a language for communicating with other community members about why things must change and the policy levers that might lead us in the preferred direction.

Community Vision and Pride

The process of prioritizing indicators for GPP forced community members to think about what outcomes are important enough to be measured over time. More important, it encouraged participants to understand how each outcome is connected. By working to improve each individual part of the circle, citizens understand that they are having a broader impact on the community (Figure 1).

Challenges of Greater Portland Pulse

The organizers and leaders of GPP had hopes of a broadly embraced and used set of indicators. The

Figure 1. Circle of Well-Being



broad community engagement effort was the most time-consuming and difficult part of the task. Collecting the data and creating a Web site were simple compared to the hard work of bringing a diverse group of people to the table to prioritize outcomes and navigate the nuances of how data should be presented.

Bringing People to a Common Understanding of the Task

The project’s organizers had a strong sense of the steps that had to be taken to arrive at a set of regional outcomes, drivers, and indicators. However, communicating that task to a group of 200 volunteers and obtaining a useful product required striking a balance between structure and flexibility to ensure that people understood what was needed but also felt their opinions mattered. The most important factor that kept them engaged and motivated was a good support structure that included team co-chairs and project staff and a university partner that could provide graduate students to perform research, tend to meeting logistics, and help solve problems.

Balancing Policy and Technical Perspectives

The process of choosing outcomes and creating indicators is both visionary and technical. Sometimes there were tensions between these two aspects of the task. The teams included people who knew little about data and statistics but had a solid grounding in the policy issues. Sometimes it was difficult to balance their perspectives against the more practical

perspectives of the data experts who were concerned about the extent to which an indicator and its data sources were truly representative of the outcome, reliable, and cheaply and easily available.

Maintaining Momentum and Attention

The GPP project lasted eighteen months from kick-off meeting to Web site launch. Maintaining the attention and commitment of so many volunteers over that long period of time was difficult, and we found that the teams had uneven participation. We knew from the start that it would be very important for each team to have both staff support and volunteer leadership. We recruited coleaders from among the team members who commanded the respect of the group and were willing to use their personal relationships to encourage participation. Even this structure, however, was difficult to maintain as team leaders shifted professional positions over the course of the effort and occasionally needed to resign.

Private Sector Engagement

We found it difficult to consistently engage private sector representatives. This is primarily a result, we suspect, of parallel efforts within organizations supported by the private sector to develop data and analyses that offered a specific perspective.

When the process of developing the initial indicators was complete, we reengaged the private sector in a number of ways to obtain their input on improving

the quality of the data for indicators of particular interest to the business sector.

Taking the Time to Deal with Conflict

Because we limited the number of indicators each team could choose, teams had to set priorities. This priority-setting process inevitably led to conflict among different perspectives about what was most important to measure. For example, the healthy environment team struggled with whether some measures should measure the health of the environment for its own sake, apart from its value to humans. We had no choice but to allow this team the time and support required to work through this conflict and to achieve a result that was a compromise that most team members could support.

Project Achievements, Disappointments, and Lessons

Once the indicators were approved by the advisory committee, they were installed in a Web portal (portlandpulse.org) that shows each of the indicators on a page that explains why the indicator was chosen, the key trends, and an interactive graphing and mapping tool that users can customize and import into their own reports, presentations, and webpages.

The most important achievement of the project to date is the collaboration that occurred among the members of the advisory committee to come to agreement about the thirty-seven outcomes and sixty-seven indicators that we are currently using to track the well-being of our region. As we have presented the GPP data to groups of elected officials, nonprofit boards, policy analysts, and other community leaders, we have found that the data do stimulate conversation about the region's well-being.

Another achievement is the use of our data and Web site by advocates and implementers. We have conducted workshops across the region to introduce the Web site and its data and tools to advocacy organizations, public sector agencies, nonprofit groups, and neighborhood associations. We know that some of these organizations are using our data to inform grant proposals, policy options papers, and investments in service delivery throughout the region.

Our biggest disappointments so far are twofold:

1. As yet we have not formed a permanent board of advisors to govern the project, meet regularly, discuss the data, and translate the data into meaning and action. As highlighted by the work of Judith Innes and David Booher, one of the most important and lasting impacts of designing and implementing a community indicators system occurs when measures are embedded in the practices and thinking of institutions and communities. We believe that this can happen only with high-level leadership meeting on a regular basis, studying the indicators, discussing them, and using them to formulate collaborative projects.
2. Our failure to engage the private sector more deeply in the process was a missed opportunity. We believe that had we been more successful in engaging the private sector early on, the conversation would have led to richer discussions about the connections among equity, quality of life, and economic prosperity. Although these conversations currently occur throughout the region, typically they occur among people who agree with one another. By gaining the commitment of a larger group of private sector representatives, we could have advanced the discussion of equity and opportunity in our region.

Conclusion

GPP is only one example of the tools that communities can and are using to build the capabilities that improve civic governance. While GPP is still in its formative stages, it has already demonstrated its ability to focus a broad spectrum of the community on shared priorities and the actions that must be taken to move toward the region's preferred future. Other communities can apply the lessons learned through the GPP process by keeping these four lessons in mind:

1. *Bring everyone to the table.* Indicators are most useful if they represent the community's shared priorities. This means that choosing indicators requires developing a shared vision for the future. Not all communities are ready to develop a shared vision, and this may stall the project as it begins. Be patient and go through the process of developing a vision. The resulting

indicators will mean more when they reflect that vision.

2. *Expect disagreement; it is part of the process.* Disagreement and discussion of why one indicator should take priority over another or how the data should be displayed stimulate understanding of alternative points of view. It is only after we have illuminated those differences that we can navigate toward the commonalities.
3. *Don't promise or expect that the project will end when the indicators are chosen.* If it's done right, the process will create demand for an ongoing structure that maintains the data and the conversation about what it means. It will become part of the community's infrastructure that will need ongoing commitment and to support.
4. *Establish the project in a neutral organization that has earned the confidence of leaders on different sides of the issues.* If the people gathering and reporting on the data are viewed as having a specific agenda, some leaders will opt out of the process on the basis of an advocacy agenda or a difference in ideology. Rather than forming new connections among previously disconnected stakeholders, this can result in reinforcing the old points of view.

Indicators projects are one tool for building the seven capacities of civic governance articulated by the New Civic Index. For most metropolitan regions, a common set of data that reflects shared priorities can build these capacities by creating a process for engaging people across the region in a conversation about what is most important and forming effective, data-driven partnerships. For the Portland region, we expect indicators will continue to fill a gap in our ability to work across jurisdictions and disciplines to improve our region.

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